

Welcome Swallows at the same time. Its description appears to agree with that of the Spine-tailed Swift but I am not familiar with this species.

I noted Fork-tailed Swifts (*Apus pacificus*) in the Albany district about the same time. On January 21 three of these swifts were circling in the sky near Little Grove. The wind at the time was changing from north to west. On January 26 a single swift was seen momentarily over Eclipse Island.

—JOHN WARHAM, Perth.

Red-backed Kingfisher at Perth.—On June 28, 1956, a Red-backed Kingfisher (*Halcyon pyrrhopygia*) was seen at South Belmont. The bird was so far out of range as given by Serventy and Whittell (*Handbook of the Birds of W.A.*), i.e., all over the State, except the south-west corner, to Geraldton, Kellerberrin and Norseman, that particular notice was taken. It was perched on a telegraph wire sunning its back. The wings were drooped, exposing the back to the sun. This revealed that the lower back was a conspicuous rufous-brown. The bird's head had almost no black on it, except for a line through the eye and a few streaks on the crown, the remainder being white.

I am familiar with this species as I kept a bird in captivity at Nedlands for over six months. However, in an absence of six weeks during May and June, 1956, the bird disappeared. No corpse was found in the cage so I assume it escaped. The captive bird was moulting at the beginning of May and had a number of broken tail feathers, and also "hunger bars" across the other tail feathers. The bird at Belmont had a perfect tail.

The habit of sunning itself was noticed often with the captive bird. In addition to drooped wings the bird would raise the rufous-brown back feathers so the sunlight and heat could penetrate to the skin (cf. Warham's observations on similar behaviour in the Senegal Dove, *W.A. Nat.*, 4, 1954: 91).

If the bird I observed at Belmont was the same as that which escaped from my home at Nedlands it would be a remarkable, though not impossible coincidence.

—ERIC LINDGREN, Nedlands.

Silver Gull and Blowfish.—The poisonous properties of the common blowfish (*Spherooides pleurogramma*) were well illustrated by an incident which occurred at Point Peron on December 10, 1956. My attention was drawn by the fact that an immature Silver Gull (*Larus novae-hollandiae*) had found a dead fish and was being allowed to eat it without any interference by other gulls in the vicinity. This unusual behaviour caused me to watch the bird through binoculars. The following details from my field notes tell the story:

9.15 a.m. Seagull, immature, flecks of brown on neck and wings. Found dead blowfish and tried to swallow. Kneaded along body with beak several times.

9.17. Able to swallow fish head first.

- 9.20. Began to drink seawater. Eye became clouded in appearance and lid began to shut.
- 9.22. Arched neck and vomited.
- 9.23. Vomited again and fish was brought up.
- 9.25. More seawater drunk and vomited once more.
- 9.27. More seawater drunk and vomited again. Both times only fluid brought up.
- 9.30. Walked over to freshwater pool, drank several times. Then flew off.

The quick rejection of the fish is a tribute to the poisonous qualities. There are several cases in local history where humans have died through eating the fish. The behaviour of the gull indicates how immature birds are able to learn the dangers of blowfish without fatal consequences. Old birds never attempt to touch blowfish when these are thrown to them.

—V. N. SERVENTY, West Perth.

Silver Gulls Feeding on Ants.—Between 1630 and 1730 hours on August 19, 1956, I noticed large numbers of Silver Gulls (*Larus novae-hollandiae*) flying just above the house-tops at Como. From their behaviour it was plain that they were feeding on large alate ants since identified for me by Mr. A. M. Douglas, W.A. Museum, Perth, as *Pheidole (Anisopheidole) froggatti* Forel.

Three escape holes were found near the base of a *Banksia* stump in sandy soil and from these the alates were emerging one or two at a time at an average rate of two to three per minute from each hole. Some fluttered to the nearest vegetation and climbed several inches before taking wing, while a few were able to rise directly from the ground. Flight was almost vertical to a height of approximately 20 feet, then horizontal. The take-off was hampered in most cases by workers which moved excitedly about the escape holes, often attaching themselves by their strong mandibles to the wings or legs of the alates.

The weather at the time was clear and still with a falling air temperature. At 1715 hours the air temperature one foot above the escape holes was 64.5° F., the ground temperature standing then at 66° F. The latter was measured by a chemical thermometer thrust with its bulb six inches into the sand. When emergence commenced air and ground temperatures would probably have been almost identical.

Silver Gulls were the only birds seen. In the period of about one hour that emergence lasted they must have accounted for many thousands of ants in the Como area alone, constituting a not unimportant natural control.

Similar flights of gulls during emergence of insects have been seen south of the Swan River on two other occasions, viz., in July, 1949, over Como and in June, 1956, over a wide area extending from Applecross to East Fremantle, in each case in the afternoon. The insects on these occasions, although seen in the air, were not identified.

—M. C. RUSSELL, Como.